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POSSIBILITIES FOR SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN DISLIKED BY PEERS DUE TO ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the theoretical foundations of an interaction program addressed to children who are disliked by their peers from the school class due to their anti-social behaviour. The program is addressed to students aged 10-11, and its aim is to create conditions for participants to develop emotional self-control, interpersonal decentration and formation of their self-esteem. The quality of the program is evidenced by the changes that occurred in children participating in the activities compared to children in the control group.

The program is an example of selective prevention, the actions of which are targeted at high-risk groups exposed to social maladjustment and emotional disorders in adolescence and adulthood.

Key words: *interpersonal decentration; children disliked by peers; pedagogy; self-esteem; selective prevention; preventive program; emotional self-control*

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INTRODUCTION

In a significant part of peer groups, mainly in the classroom, children disliked by their classmates are a certain percentage of students. Research results show that these students may constitute 10-15% (Asher & Rose, 1999), and even almost 30% of the entire group (Deptuła, 2006).

Children who are disliked by their classmates are those who, in research using different sociometric techniques, receive a lot of negative choices with the simultaneous lack or a small number of positive choices (Brzezińska, 2004). They are very frequently indicated as people with whom no one from the group wants to come into contact, play, sit on the bench, work together on a particular

task (Kielar-Turska, 2003). Such a situation can be interpreted as a clearly declared form of reluctance (Cook & Cook, 2010).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The reasons for the lack of peer acceptance are mainly sought in the incorrect relations between children and their parents: insecure attachment, cold and strict parenting practices (Deptuła, 2010). These negative emotional relations between children and their caregivers may lead to disorders in children's development, and their manifestation may be specific personality features and deficits in cognitive, emotional and social competencies, significantly influencing the course of peer interactions.

BACKGROUND

The analysis of literature (Badenes, Estevan & Bacete, 2000; Bierman, 2004; Boyd & Bee, 2008; Brzezińska, 2004; Burack et al., 2006; Cook & Cook, 2010; Deptuła, 2013; Dunn, 2008; Ekiert-Grabowska, 1982; John, 1987; Musialska, 2011; van der Wilt, van der Veen & van Kruistum, 2019; Schaffer, 2007; Sikorski, 2000; Urban, 2012) shows that some students whom their peers relate to with antipathy, are more frequently characterized by impulsiveness, outbursts of anger, starting fights, using vulgar words. They read the ambiguous behaviour of others as hostile and directed against them. They are focused on themselves, their needs and feelings. It is also typical for them to perceive aggression as an effective tool for solving interpersonal conflicts and achieving their own goals. They are also characterized by self-esteem that is difficult to define. Research results show that children who are disliked, on the one hand, may have a low self-esteem and not believe in their abilities. On the other hand, they may overestimate their own abilities in most areas important for their school functioning, their own position in the peer group and friendly relations. It is very likely, however, that such a distortion of the image of oneself is supposed to protect them from the painful reality.

THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS OF INTERACTIONS

The developed program of interactions is addressed to students aged 10-11, who are disliked by their classmates due to anti-social (aggressive and egocentric)¹ behaviour. It is part of the trend of selective prevention, which

¹ The control group (K1) was called the control-experimental group (K1 / E2) because in the second measurement of variables it was treated as the control group for the experimental group (E1). After the completion of stage III, it became an experimental group. For ethical reasons, reference to the classic control group is impossible. It is not proper to take away a chance from disliked children to improve their social and emotional functioning, position in the group and relations with peers. Thus, it was assumed that interactions would also be carried out in the control group, but only after the completion of the research being the reference point for the experimental group.

is aimed at individuals and high-risk groups. These individuals and groups are exposed to a higher than average risk of different psychosocial problems and mental health disorders due to their situation (e.g. social, family, environmental) or biological conditions (Ostaszewski, 2010).

The main objective of the proposed actions is, above all, to change the social status of children who are disliked in the school class to one that proves greater acceptance by their peers. The characteristics and behaviours of disliked children described in the literature were the basis for defining specific goals, which are:

- creating conditions for developing emotional self-control,
- creating conditions for developing the ability to interpersonal decentration,
- creating conditions for forming self-esteem.

The variables (emotional self-control, interpersonal decentration and self-esteem) were defined and operationalized before the development of the individual activity scenarios included in the program. These variables were evaluated before and after the activities with the children. The classes were provided with the use of active methods by school teachers adequately prepared to conduct them and by the students of pedagogy who assisted them.

EMOTIONAL SELF-CONTROL

Emotional self-control is the ability to express one's emotions adequately to the situation and in ways that are socially acceptable (Brzeziński, 1973). For it to be effective, certain conditions must be met. An individual must first of all recognize (verbalize) emotions (one's own or someone else's), define their character and intensity. He must become aware of the source of these emotions (the situation preceding their occurrence and his own thoughts arising in connection with this situation), the probable consequences of different ways of expressing them and the applicable rules of conduct in the already recognized situation and apply them appropriately (cf. 1979; Kofta, 1979).

Therefore, as children disliked by antisocial behaviour have deficits in this regard, the following operational goals have been formulated, which include creating the conditions for:

- enriching children's knowledge about feelings (accompanying non-verbal symptoms, causes, constructive ways of dealing with them, their importance in human life),
- encouraging them to name their own and other people's emotions,
- directing children's attention to the perception of the relation between emotions and the situations that precede them and the consequences to which they can lead,
- practicing by children the ability to deal with difficult emotions in an acceptable way,
- training participants to practice expressing emotions in an assertive way.

INTERPERSONAL DECENTRATION

Interpersonal deccentration is defined as the ability to adopt the perspective of another person (Polkowska, 2000). It allows you to evaluate your deliberate behaviour from the perspective of other people, coordinate various perspectives (one's own and someone else's), modify one's own behaviour depending on its expected consequences for other people, as well as understand the reasons for the behaviour of others and distinguish between their deliberate intentions and those of others. accidental action (Grochulska, 1992; Malinowska, 1985; Skarżyńska, 1985).

After taking into account the developmental deficits of children who are disliked due to their antisocial behaviour, the following operational goals were formulated, including creating conditions for:

- developing students' abilities to notice the effects of their own actions on other people,
- encouraging children to think about the reasons for other people's behaviour,
- developing in children the ability to put themselves in the shoes of another person and interpret social situations from different points of view.

SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is a person's relation with oneself, general self-assessment, faith in oneself and one's abilities. Self-esteem is formed under the influence of different experiences of an individual and perceived own position in a group or opinions of other people (Juczyński, 2005).

The global self-esteem of children disliked due to antisocial behaviour is difficult to be determined, however, in the case of children and adolescents showing symptoms of social maladjustment, one of the goals of corrective actions should be to modify improperly formed self-esteem. Therefore, operational goals were formulated, including the creation of conditions for:

- encouraging children to get to know themselves,
- organizing experiences for children that enable them to construct a positive attitude towards themselves,
- encouraging children to take on the role of a leader and thus experiencing the possibility of affecting the activity of the group.

EXPLANING THE MECHANISM OF THE EXPECTED CHANGES

The developed program is based on the assumptions of the information discrepancy theory by W. Łukaszewski (1974), the theory of social learning by A. Bandura (2007) and selected elements of the Person-Centered Approach by C. Rogers (2002).

According to the assumptions of the theory of W. Łukaszewski (1974), noticing by an individual a discrepancy between the system of incoming information and the system of information encoded in cognitive structures may activate taking actions aimed at its reduction. Thus, during the classes, the children were repeatedly provided with information (regarding, among others, socially accepted ways of expressing emotions, the results of not taking into account the needs and feelings of others in their actions), which were inconsistent with the information system encoded by them in cognitive structures (e.g. focus only on their own needs and feelings, expressing emotions in an aggressive way).

It was also assumed, according to the theory of social learning by A. Bandura (2007), that by observing ways of dealing with interpersonal conflicts devoid of aggression and self-centeredness, children could learn new, constructive behaviours, while weakening learned unacceptable socially ways of doing things. During the course of the classes, different factors were applied to increase the effectiveness of modelling (e.g. self-efficacy, detailed presentation of behaviours from the simplest to the most difficult, with a large number of repetitions, examples of difficult situations from the everyday class life of the children).

Additionally, the attitude of the instructors was of great significance for the participants to acquire new skills. It was important that the educators, according to the theory of C. Rogers (2002), were authentic, accepting children and empathically listening to their feelings and needs. It was assumed that due to this, they might have a better chance of establishing closer contact with children and supporting their development in the field of the skills that were being developed.

METHODOLOGICAL FUNDAMENTALS OF RESEARCH

The effectiveness of the developed program to support the psychosocial development of children disliked by their peers due to antisocial (aggressive and egocentric) behaviour was the subject of the research. The indicator of its effectiveness was considered to be the changes taking place in the social status of the classroom, the way peers and class teachers perceived them as well as the emotional self-control, the ability to interpersonal decentration and the self-esteem of children. These changes were compared with those that appeared at the same time in disliked children not enrolled in such a program.

It was assumed that as a result of creating conditions for children disliked by their peers to develop emotional self-control, the ability to interpersonal decentration and forming self-esteem, there might be a favourable change in their perception by their peers and class educators, which in turn might contribute to the modification of the low social position that disliked children occupy in the classroom.

The research was conducted according to the experimental plan with a control group with the initial (pre-test) and final (post-test) measurement of the dependent variables. Due to the goals of the program, children disliked due to antisocial behaviour were selected from school classes, but their assignment to comparison groups (experimental and control) was random.

The following stages of the research were assumed:

- I. selecting children disliked by their peers from the classes and conducting the first measurement of variables in the experimental group (E1) and control group (K1/E2²),
- II. carrying out interactions in the experimental group (E1),
- III. conducting the 2nd measurement of variables in the experimental (E1) and control (K1 / E2) groups,
- IV. carrying out interactions in the experimental group (K1 / E2),
- V. conducting the third measurement of variables in the experimental groups (E1 and K1 / E2) and control (K2³).

From a group of almost 600 students of 25 fourth grades from seven primary schools in Bydgoszcz, 155 students who were disliked due to anti-social behaviour were selected. Their parents were informed that their children were invited to take part in the Program for Developing Ability to Deal With Difficult Feelings and Build Good Relationships with Others. After 104 students had obtained their parents' written consent to participate in further research and activities, they were randomly assigned to groups E1 and K1 / E2. In the course of the studies, the population of children participating in them decreased to 94 people. Due to the parents' decision (withdrawal of consent to participate in classes and tests), ten children were excluded from the conducted research. Another 7 students were also excluded because they attended their group meetings irregularly. Ultimately, group E1 consisted of a total of 36 people, group K1 / E2 a total of 35 people, and group K2 — 16 people.

SELECTED RESULTS OF THE PROGRAM EVALUATION

The results obtained in the course of the research show that after the participation of children who are disliked due to antisocial behaviour (from groups E1 and K1 / E2) in the classes:

² The control group (K1) was called the control-experimental group (K1 / E2) because in the second measurement of variables it was treated as the control group for the experimental group (E1). After the completion of stage III, it became an experimental group. For ethical reasons, reference to the classic control group is impossible. It is not proper to take away a chance from disliked children to improve their social and emotional functioning, position in the group and relations with peers. Thus, it was assumed that interactions would also be carried out in the control group, but only after the completion of the research being the reference point for the experimental group.

³ At the beginning of stage II, when the interactions in group E1 began, some children, after the first measurement of variables, resigned from participating in the classes. Such a situation also took place at the beginning of stage IV, when children from group K1 / E2 took part in the activities. Since the parents of these children did not withdraw their consent to participate in the research, it was decided to create a control group (K2) from these children, the existence of which was not previously planned.

- their results obtained in the field of selected dimensions of emotional self-control improved (recognizing emotions on the basis of non-verbal symptoms, recognizing the situational context of emotions, declared ways of expressing emotions in hypothetical situations, the level of anger directed inward; in group K1 / E2 significant changes beyond inner anger)
- their results obtained in terms of selected dimensions of the indirectly tested ability to interpersonal decentration also improved (noticing the consequences of negative acts from the perpetrator's perspective, simultaneous consideration of the effects from both perspectives — the perpetrator and the victim; changes significant in both groups).

The social position in the school class of children participating in the classes also changed favourably, because after the end of the program, these children occupied positions in the group that proved to be more accepted by their peers. Moreover, their peers' perception of constructive behaviour and their perception by educators improved.

In the course of the third measurement of variables (7-8 months after the end of the interactions in group E1), the durability of changes that occurred in children from group E1 after the end of the classes was assessed, compared to the changes that occurred at the same time in children from group K2. In the third measurement compared to the first children from group E1:

- had a significantly higher social status in the class than before the interactions,
- were significantly better perceived by their peers in terms of non-aggressive behaviour, evidence of emotional control,
- were better perceived by class teachers (insignificant changes),
- obtained better results in terms of emotional self-control (except for the dimension of attitudes towards aggressive behaviour),
- obtained significantly higher results in selected dimensions of the ability to interpersonal decentration (including noticing the effects of negative acts from the perpetrator's perspective, the sum of the effects from both perspectives, simultaneous consideration of both perspectives).

Children from group K2 obtained worse results in the third measurement than in the first one or the changes that occurred in them during this time were not as large as in group E1.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

The program presented in this article was designed for children who occupy the lowest position in the social structure of the group because they behave aggressively and egocentrically towards their peers. These are "endangered" children (cf. McWhirter et al., 2001), as they lack all the abilities and competencies which enable them to develop resistance to unfavourable social, family and personal experiences. Influencing this group, aimed at developing, among

others, the ability to deal with difficult emotions in an accepted way, to take into account the needs and feelings of others in one's own actions, as well as to form a positive attitude towards oneself, is all the more important as the status of unaccepted children in the classroom is relatively permanent, which may lead to the increase of unfavourable consequences related to it and a greater sense of loneliness among peers.

The selected results of the assessment, presented in the article, relate to the first version of the program, which consisted of 20 scenarios of activities carried out for almost 3 months in a cycle of two 1.5-hour meetings during the following weeks. However, after the end of the classes and after receiving feedback from the instructors, the program was modified, extending its duration to 32 meetings. The modification consisted mainly of supplementing the scenarios with a larger number of exercises that could be used to form the self-esteem of the participants, and the number of art and movement games that allowed for the integration and release of the accumulated tension was also increased. Extending the duration of the classes was primarily to enable the participating children to better consolidate the skills they were developing.

The adopted methodological procedure as well as the results of the program assessment studies made the developed program of interactions meet the quality criteria specified in the "Recommendation System for Mental Health Prevention and Promotion Programs" developed by the National Bureau for Drug Prevention and obtained a recommendation at the "Good Practice" level.

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МОЖЛИВОСТІ ПІДТРИМКИ ДІТЕЙ З АНТИСОЦІАЛЬНОЮ ПОВЕДІНКОЮ

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У статті викладено теоретичні основи програми взаємодії, адресованої дітям, яких не приймають однолітки через антисоціальну поведінку. Програма розрахована на учнів 10-11 років і має на меті створити умови для розвитку в учасників емоційного самоконтролю, міжособистісної децентрації та формування їхньої самооцінки. Про якість програми свідчать зміни, які відбулися у дітей, які брали участь у заходах, порівняно з дітьми контрольної групи.

Програма є прикладом селективної профілактики, дії якої спрямовані на групи високого ризику, схильні до соціальної дезадаптації та емоційних розладів у підлітковому та дорослому віці. Програма розрахована на дітей, які займають найнижче положення в соціальній структурі групи, оскільки поводяться агресивно та егоцентрично по відношенню до однолітків. Це діти, які перебувають під загрозою зникнення, оскільки їм не вистачає всіх здібностей і компетенцій, які дозволяють розвивати опір несприятливому соціальному, сімейному та особистому досвіду. Вплив на цю групу, спрямований, серед іншого, на розвиток здатності прийнятно справлятися з важкими емоціями, враховувати потреби

та почуття інших у власних діях, а також формувати позитивне ставлення до себе. Статус неприйнятих дітей у класі є відносно постійним, що може призвести до посилення пов'язаних із ним несприятливих наслідків та посилення почуття самотності серед однолітків.

Ключові слова: міжособистісна децентрація; діти, неприйняті однолітками; педагогіка; самооцінка; вибіркова профілактика; профілактична програма; емоційний самоконтроль.

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